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Inspirations: A jewelry business that makes a world of difference

Sarah's Hope Jewelry changes women's lives.

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April 2014



Elia Rose, a tortilla maker from Nicaragua, and Sarah Smith

Eusebia, a widowed mother of 12 in Nicaragua, used a \$100 microloan to plant an acre of red beans. Over 10 years, she was able to parlay that into a 100-acre spread where she raises cattle and hogs.

"I have seen firsthand how education and microfinance can completely transform a life from poverty to prosperity."

In Afghanistan, a woman living traditionally cannot work outside the home, so a woman named Nepton used a microloan to raise chickens in her backyard and sell eggs to local shops. Now she has expanded into the neighbor's yard too.

These are just two of hundreds of women whose lives have changed because of [Sarah's Hope Jewelry](#). This Middleton, Wisc., company was started so that it can support microfinance institutions (loans starting at \$50) and small business training programs for women living in difficult or impoverished circumstances, both in the United States and abroad. The company donates at least 10 percent of profits to nonprofit organizations that do this life-changing work.

"I have traveled to meet with many of the recipients and have seen firsthand how education and microfinance can completely transform a life from poverty to prosperity," says founder Sarah J. Smith.

Smith meets personally with the women who have received loans and scholarships, then returns home to design a piece of jewelry that reflects their story. Each piece showcases a proprietary stone called E'Sperene®, a composite of quartz and metal oxides with vibrant colors that shift as the light changes, reflecting the changes Sarah's Hope offers. (*Espère* is French for hope.)

Unique business values

Smith describes herself as "an entrepreneur to the bone," whose first business, launched at age 14 with her sister, paid for her college education. After obtaining a masters of divinity and a second masters and doctorate of theology, she put her strong theological and entrepreneurial background to work in a new calling: helping women rise out of poverty.

"Unlike other businesses, especially public companies, where the business model and value proposition is driving earnings and value for investors, we want to bring hope to others," she says. "Our motto is, if we are not helping alleviate human need in some capacity, we have no business being in business."

How it works

Sarah's Hope Jewelry, a UPS customer, partners with organizations such as MEDA (Mennonite Economic Development Associates) and microfinance institutions that distribute the loans, and ASSETS (A Service for Self-Employment Training and Support), to provide scholarships for small business training.

"We want people to understand the women, their stories, and the power of microfinance to help women improve their circumstances," Smith says. "It's a giving circle."

Smith's personal connection extends to the company's international supply chain as well. Jewelry is manufactured in the United States, Italy and China following fair trade standards.

She travels to the factories and sits on the assembly line alongside the workers. "We care about all the people involved in the process," she says. "I want to know that things are being fairly produced and workers fairly treated."

UPS has been an integral part of the business, handling inbound and outbound logistics worldwide. The company uses [WorldShip](#)® and [UPS CampusShip](#)® for its shipping, which saves time on shipping tasks. "We could not have accomplished what we have without the help of UPS," Smith says. "It's been a real partnership."

Get involved

"Running a business and a charity at the same time takes a lot of energy," Sarah says. "But giving is contagious, and people want to help."

So in 2011 Smith launched a program called Giving Back Locally. Now, when customers buy Sarah's Hope pieces, the retail jeweler donates a portion of the proceeds to local charities, ranging from soup kitchens to women's shelters, Habitat for Humanity or the United Way.

"Our customers raised \$100,000 for charities in their backyard this way," she says. "Being able to see this happen in the United States and Canada is really rewarding. And it's something any company can incorporate in its business model."

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